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A BOOTBLACK'S TALK ON COLLECTORS

by *Charles Battell Loomis*

Once in a while I like to hear the unbiased opinion of a man who has no axe to grind and whose outlook on art is fresh. That is why I took the little bootblack, who sometimes attempts to disguise my Jersey shoes, to see an exhibition of American pictures on Fifth Avenue the other day.

"Boss," said he, as we halted before a beautiful canvas painted by Wyant, "W'y will blokes dat have more money dan dey have taste spend ten t'ousan' dollars on a for'n pickcher w'en dey could get sump'n' by an American for a t'ousan'?"

"Gee, boss, it's makes me sick w'en I t'ink of de money dat goes to make dese art dealers in French han'-me-downs rich, dat ought to go into der pockets of der brave boys dat's starvin' in New York garrets, tryin' to make a meal out of a pickcher of a beefsteak.

"Boss, I sometimes t'inks dat it isn't a reel love for art in de abstrac' dat leads dese oil kings to get oil paintin's. (Dat's funny ain't it? A feller makes a fortune in oil, an' den he blows a lot of it in on oils.) But I sometimes says to meself dat if some of der ducks dat has der fines' collections was sent out to make a collection all by deir own selves—gee, der t'ings dey'd bring in would make a colored supplement look like high art.

"Spendin' de most of his time in de office of a skyscraper ain't der bes' way to eddicate a man in de love for reel art. I say dat if a geezer beats it out to der woods an' takes a squint at der clouds an' der sky an' let's der scenery sink in to his inner consciousness, as I heard a feller say, w'y den he's in a position to know a good pickcher w'en he sees one. But most of dese money kings don't know what nature is. An' so dey don't know what pickchers of nature is, needer.

"Gee, ain't dat a 'teaser? Look at dem clouds. If I was to blow at dem dey'd float out of der frame. Some painters seem to t'ink dat clouds is made out of paint an'

der more paint dey use and der t'icker dey smear it der more de clouds'll look like der reel t'ing. W'en I'm lookin' at a pickcher I don't want to be reminded of der Sherwood or der Holbein studios, I want to be reminded of out doors. A feller's got to have *some* of dis stuff dat pianists have—dis *teckneek*—but der feller dat gits my money every time is der feller dat makes me forgit der boot blackin' business an' remin's me of happy days at Coney Islan' an' udder country places.

"Brains is a dam good t'ing to mix wid paint, as der Bible tells us, but feelin' hits ten people w'e're brains on'y hits one. I like to see not what de artist *t'ought* about der landscape but how he felt der blamed t'ing. W'en me peepers gits runny an' I has to wipe me nose on me sleeve I know der bloke dat juggled der paint had a heart too, an' I don't care if he on'y began day before yesterday an' it's go'n to be fifty years before his pickchers have any value to dese oil sardines—I want his pickcher now. And if you was to show me some by any of dose for'n blokies—even Israels wid his everlastin' inferior interiors—I wouldn't give it house room, if me peepers wouldn't wet up at sight of it.

"Dere's a lot of blokies goes into raptures over Israels (w'en dey know for sure de t'ing is by him) an' dey call your attention to de Dutch kid in der Dutch cradle an' der house dat wouldn't fetch five dollars a mont' rent down in Baxter street, an' dey say, 'W'ot soul! Peanuts! W'ot does de average art collector know about soul? An' how much would he rave over a reel Dutch interior? He don't know dat Israels knows how to paint—all he knows is de fac dat Israels' pickchers will always sell for a dam sight more dan dey cost an' dat's why he's an art lover. Look at him, after he's slobbered over der pickcher for ten minutes, w'en der dealer says, 'Oh, I made a mistake! dat's by a man named Brown dat lives up in 58 street an' spent last summer in Holland.' He says, 'Gee, I

The Collector and Art Critic

t'ought I missed der hand of der master.'

"Der han' of der master! He wouldn't know Velasquez's han' if he saw it in der Prado. Dat's a fac', boss. Dese art collectors gives me der willies. Dey always hol's dair heads so high. Dere was one wit spinach on his coat collar comes into Schaus's one day w'en I was dere an' der proprietor shows him dem dandy Arizona pictures of Grolls'. Now dose are painted by a man dat has tree t'ings, an eye, an' a heart, an' a dam good fist, an' dey was done down dere in Arizona, w'ere a feller can't foller tradition but has ter interpret nature in der American language.

"Dere was one cloud in a blue sky dat would have been a bully restin' place for der bes' angels dat ever got out of purgatory. Well dis feller wid dollars oozin out of his body at every jernt looks at der pickchers for nearly five secon's an' den he says, 'Quite creditable. Show me dat Ziem dat belongs to his 1875 period.'

"Say, boss, I foller der spinach collar in an' dey brought out a dinky t'ing dat was just in Ziem's day's work. Nuttin' big nor movin' in it.

"But dat rich person troo a fit in front of it. 'How such did you say dat was?' said he.

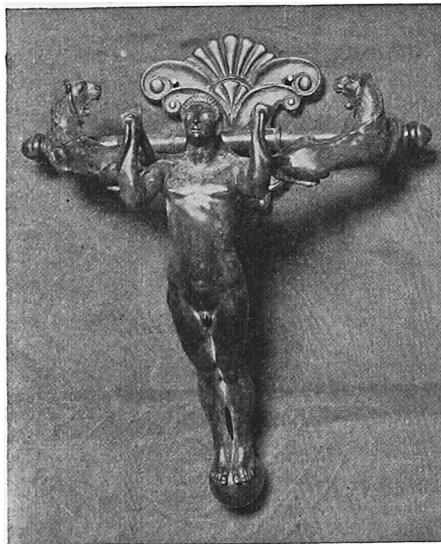
"Dey murmured der price in his ear, an' he said, 'If I hadn't paid \$10,000 for a Cazin yesterday I believe I'd buy dis. It's a t'ing to live wid.'

"Den he sweeps out an never gave der Grolls anudder t'ought.

"Say, boss it's no wonder dat Socialism is growin' day by day, w'en we poor blokes has all de art *sense* an' der spinach collars has der price.

"See yer to-morrer. If you'd keep out of der red clay I wouldn't have such a job takin' der landscapes off yer feet wid me brush. If I was to plaster der mud on a canvas an' sign it wid one of dese French or Dutch names I'll bet a dealer could get a \$1,000 for it out of a spinach collar."

Two Door Knockers by Angelo del Nero



Bronze with silver niello work



Bronze and fire gilding, with silver niello work

Sig. del Nero, who maintains studios and workshops in New York and Rome and who makes wonderful experiments with artificial patinas, reproducing antique bronzes in the size and patina of

the originals, shows some admirable craftwork at his current exhibition, which is of exceptional interest and beauty.

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